PALS summer teachers and interns welcomed Celeste McGraw (pictured above), the program’s new 7th-grade master teacher. “Her many years of experience in middle school education were wonderfully evident,” says PALS Director Greg Wilkin. “One has only to step into the warm and welcoming learning spaces Celeste creates to appreciate what a gift she has for this work.”

During the winter months, Alix Driscoll, PALS associate director and longtime master teacher, has been spending much of her time getting 8th-graders organized and helping them with high school applications, teacher recommendations, and financial aid forms. “I always look forward to spring, when Alix shares good admission news,” says Wilkin. “Word spreads quickly, and the high spirits are contagious.”
Established in 1988, PALS is a two-year, year-round program that provides academic enrichment, study skills, and learning strategies for Lawrence middle school students and assists them with the high school application process. At the same time, PALS provides a unique opportunity for Phillips Academy and Andover High School student volunteers to work side by side as mentors and teachers, supported by a carefully planned curriculum and experienced, qualified adults.

The “PALS” name is derived from the key partners in this program: Phillips Academy, Andover High School, and the Lawrence Schools.

Students’ declarations of love for a prospective high school, announcements of their admission to top-choice schools, news of scholarships received, and intimations of long-term career hopes—these are great moments for PALS teachers. In these pages, you will see evidence of such moments and hints of the many things that make our jobs so rewarding.

When Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, spoke on campus a few years ago, she told us that the world needs men and women whose ambitions are big enough to involve others. One of the nuances of her remark is that selflessness and ambition can work together. We frequently see that in our Phillips Academy and Andover High School student volunteers, who initially choose to work in PALS with their own college admission in mind—but soon become ambitious on behalf of their PALS students. Good high school admission news for their middle schoolers makes them just as happy as their own successes.

PALS continues to evolve with each passing year, yet we prize our proven traditions and successful initiatives, such as the popular trip we take most summers to the Pfizer facility in Andover. Touring in blue lab scrubs, students hear about ongoing research and the production of new pharmaceuticals and get a glimpse of the type of important work that they might be involved with—if they study hard—in only a few years. (And it may even be at Pfizer!)

Generous partners like Pfizer help us build on the fine work of our students’ teachers at Lawrence’s UP Academy Leonard and Parthum Middle School. Our PALS students deserve nothing less than this concerted effort.

If you have ideas about other ways we can foster experiential learning for our PALS students or otherwise improve the impact of our teaching, please contact me at gwilkin@andover.edu.

Best wishes,

Greg Wilkin

Photography: Gil Talbot, John Hurley, Jill Clerkin
In mid-July, approximately 30 PALS 8th-graders and interns visited the Pfizer pharmaceutical facility in Andover, Mass. Pfizer has hosted upward of 200 PALS students since 2008.

The group was welcomed by Andover site head Jon Tucker (pictured above). They later enjoyed a dynamic presentation by Dr. Tom Porter from the Analytical Research and Development Laboratories that involved BMP-2 (Bone morphogenetic protein 2), “skelefacts,” and biotech terminology and background.

During a hands-on tour of the Bioprocess R&D Laboratories, students learned about the properties of resins and column chromatography as a purification technique. The group also toured the Andover Pilot Lab and received an overview of the cell culture and purification process.

Personnel talked about the myriad career opportunities available in biotech—from manufacturing, laboratory, and engineering responsibilities to IT and HR support.

The Pfizer partnership plays an important role in supporting the PALS program by showing the importance of education and strong STEM educational foundations for today’s students.

The experience helps the young students understand the longer term rewards of staying in school and the types of opportunities that await them if they continue their education to college and beyond.

Pfizer produces products and medicines that support wellness and prevention, as well as treatment and cures for a broad range of diseases. Some familiar over-the-counter products include Advil, Chapstick, and Centrum vitamins.
Part of what makes PALS alumni so vital to the program is the many experiences they have in common with their students. Here, four PALS alumni—teachers in summer 2014—share their memories and some thoughts about teaching kids in whom they so often see themselves.

Shailene Nuñez, PALS ’07
Master Teacher, 8th-Grade Math

I loved the summer field trips to the Museum of Natural History, Boston Aquarium, Museum of Science, and art galleries. PALS made me feel like I was doing better for myself. The interns made subjects more interesting, and I didn’t feel burdened by the schoolwork. They also made sure that I finished my high school applications on time.

It was exciting to come back. Today’s students aren’t thrilled about extra homework, but they understand that it’s for the better, and almost all of them complete every assignment. Sometimes the kids ask the PALS alums for advice about things like financial aid and scholarships because they know we’ve been in the same situation.

A four-year PALS teaching veteran, Shailene is a senior at UMass–Lowell majoring in business, finance, and management.

Gordon Genett, PALS ’09
Assistant Master Teacher, 7th-Grade Math

Its very caring staff was one of the first things that impressed me about PALS. I loved coming to the program every day—especially on Wednesdays, when we swam in the pool. The extra math practice really helped my understanding and improved my self-confidence.

It was very nostalgic coming back to PALS. I was able to view the program from both perspectives and see how special it really is. I know the kinds of families and schools these kids come from, and I also know what will pique their interests. Today’s students do want to learn—you just have to break through the wall of stubbornness.

This was Gordon’s third summer as a PALS teacher; he plans to return in 2015. A junior at the University of New Hampshire, he is majoring in biology.
Nicole Cruz, PALS ’09
Assistant Master Teacher,
8th-Grade Language Arts

PALS was intimidating at first, but I got comfortable quickly. The campus was beautiful, and I instantly fell in love with the food. The best part was the interns. I was very shy, but they always made me feel welcome and included. By the second summer, I was way more outgoing. When I started 8th grade, I felt focused and prepared.

I was excited to return to PALS as an intern to help the younger students, especially the shy ones; I like to see them break out of their shells. Alums can relate a lot easier to PALS students because we’ve been in their shoes—and they know it.

This was Nicole’s third summer as a PALS teacher. Currently attending Middlesex Community College, she plans to earn a BA degree in psychology at UMass–Lowell.

Austin Genett, PALS ’09
Instructor,
8th-Grade Math

I thought that PALS was a fun program that would help keep me on the right track in life. PALS made me feel more confident talking to people older than myself, and improved my math skills.

It felt great to come back and do for other kids what PALS interns had done for me. When the kids are feeling uninspired or having a bad day, I usually tell them a story about when I felt the very same way. Then I tell them how important math is going to be in their academic careers and how I use it in my everyday life. Having also come out of Lawrence Public Schools helps PALS alumni empathize and see things from the kids’ perspectives.

Austin is a two-year PALS teaching veteran. A junior at the University of New Hampshire, he is majoring in mechanical engineering.
2014 Program Overview

PALS helps shape young people for lifetime success

With a primary goal of strengthening mathematics and language arts skills, PALS also strives to bolster Lawrence middle school students’ self-confidence and heighten their achievement expectations in high school and beyond.

Many PALS students are the first in their families to attend a U.S. high school. Teachers guide students as they learn about, choose from, and apply to various public and private high schools in the area. The program also works closely with parents and guardians; complicated applications, such as those for financial aid and scholarships, can be overwhelming for those whose first language is not English.

7th-Graders

Summer 2014 began with four weeks of study and camaraderie on the Phillips Academy campus. Working in small groups with their teachers and mentors, students crafted autobiographies and began thinking about high school. A new class in clay sculpture, under the tutelage of Elizabeth Wilkin (pictured at left) of the Black Iris Art Studio, proved very popular, as was the addition of Ultimate Frisbee as a sports option.

Beginning in September, 7th-graders continued their studies in preparation for the spring SSAT exams. Under the direction of master teacher Celeste McGraw, after-school classes are conducted twice weekly by student volunteers from Phillips Academy and Andover High School.

8th-Graders

The journey toward high school accelerates during the second year. In the summer, 8th-graders reworked their autobiographies, learned more about area high schools, and practiced being interviewed. High school admission directors visited to answer questions, and teachers helped the students zero in on “best fits.” The annual PALS-Pfizer field trip (see earlier story) was a highlight, as usual.

In the fall and early winter, students polished and submitted their applications with plenty of encouraging guidance. As acceptances are received, teachers will help students evaluate their options. In the spring, student volunteers will further prepare the 8th-graders for success in their chosen high school by focusing on study and time management skills.
PALS Alma Maters

Further learning leads to greater opportunities

High Schools
Andover High School
Austin Preparatory School
Boston Arts Academy
Central Catholic High School
Dorchester High School
Georgetown High School
Greater Lawrence Technical School
Lawrence High School
Methuen High School
Noble and Greenough School
Notre Dame Cristo Rey High School (formerly Notre Dame High School)
Phillips Academy
Presentation of Mary Academy
St. John’s Preparatory School

Colleges and Universities
Amherst College
Anna Maria College
Assumption College
Bentley University
Boston College
Boston University
Brandeis University
Bridgewater State University
Brown University
Clark University
College of the Holy Cross
Dartmouth College
Emmanuel College
Fairfield University
Florida Institute of Technology
Gordon College
Massachusetts College of Art
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Merrimack College
Miami Industrial College of Arts and Science
Middlesex Community College
Norfolk State University
Northern Essex Community College
Princeton University
Quinnipiac University
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Saint Anselm College
Salem State University
Suffolk University
UMass Amherst
UMass Boston
UMass Lowell
Union College
University of Rhode Island
Wentworth Institute of Technology
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Worcester State University
Yale University

Nearly 100 percent of PALS alumni graduate from high school. Well over 90 percent go on to college.

“PALS is a really tight-knit community. Many of the kids come back as interns, creating a constant loop of compassionate and caring teachers who really have the kids’ best interests at heart.”

— Austin Genett, PALS ’09
Instructor, 8th-Grade Math
Our Donors

We gratefully acknowledge our 2013–2014 donors, whose generous contributions once again supported 100 percent of the PALS operating budget.

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*deceased  P = Parent of Phillips Academy alumni  GP = Grandparent

Please support PALS! You will help deserving youngsters from Lawrence by nurturing and strengthening their aspirations for high school, college, and beyond. Visit www.andover.edu/palsgiving to make a gift today.